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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR BRIEFS ESTONIAN MPS ON U.S. FOREIGN
POLICY PRIORITIES

¶1. (SBU) Ambassador briefed Estonian Parliamentarians October 16 on the U.S.-Estonia relationship. His presentation, at the invitation of Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Sven Mikser (Defense Minister from 2002-2003), informed key members of parliament ahead of Estonia's decision on whether to extend Estonia's participation in ongoing military missions, including Iraq and Afghanistan (both of which expire at the end of the year). Following Ambassador's remarks, committee members asked a wide range of questions, covering U.S. policy on Missile Defense, Ukraine, Georgia, Turkey, Kosovo and Russia, in addition to Iraq and Afghanistan. The Estonian MPs were also interested in the possible effect upcoming U.S. elections will have on U.S. foreign policy.

¶2. (U) The briefing proved extremely timely when later the same day the Prime Minister's foreign policy advisor informed visiting EUR/NB Director Gilchrist and DCM that the Government of Estonia (GOE) had recently finished the draft mandate extensions and planned to submit them to Parliament on October 18.

¶3. (U) The GOE subsequently approved the draft resolutions on extending Estonian troops' participation in overseas military missions. The resolutions must be approved by a simple majority in the Parliament in order to take effect. On October 18, Minister of Defense Jaak Aaviksoo commented that the GOE is not planning to alter the numbers of Estonian troops participating in the Iraq mission. Aaviksoo also stated that the GOE shares the U.S. view that the international military presence in Iraq needs to be gradually transformed into a civilian mission and noted that at this time the GOE does not plan to extend Estonia's Iraq mission beyond 2008.

¶4. (SBU) Briefing attendees from the FAC included; Sven Mikser, FAC Chair (Social Democrat), Enn Eesma, FAC Vice-Chair (Center Party), Valdur Lahtvee (Green Party Faction Leader), Silver Meikar (Reform Party), Toomas Varek (Center Party) and Peeter Tulviste (Pro-Patria and Res Publica Union Party). Three committee members were absent due to travel and two members were absent due to illness.

¶5. (U) Accompanying the Ambassador at the briefing were the EUR/NB Director, DCM, Political/Economic Section Chief, Defense and Naval Attache, Poloff (note taker) and Pol Assistant.

¶6. (U) COMMENT: The MPs clearly welcomed the chance to get an up-close look at U.S. policy and were impressed by Ambassador's presentation. While the Iraq mandate, specifically, remains somewhat controversial in government circles (and the media), we nonetheless believe its extension by the Estonian Parliament will be achieved. The

Afghanistan mandate has broad political and popular support. Post thanks Washington for assistance in providing the necessary materials to make this briefing successful. END COMMENT.

Phillips